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The Nature and Extent of Christian Love.

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SERMON,

PREACH'D

On *SUNDAY*, AUGUST 25, 1754,

IN THE

Collegiate Church of MANCHESTER,

At the REQUEST of the

TREASURER, *&c.*

OF THE

INFIRMARY,

TO

Recommend an *Annual Collection*, towards *the Support* of that CHARITY.

By THOMAS MOSS, A. M.
Fellow *of the said Collegiate Church.*

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MANCHESTER: Printed by JOSEPH HARROP;
For Messrs. NEWTON's, Booksellers. Price Six-Pence.

MARSH

SERMON

PREACHED

IN THE

Collegiate Church of MANCHESTER,

AT

THE VISITATION

OF

THE REVEREND JOSEPH HARROP, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER,

ON

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 1727.

BY THOMAS MOSS, A.M.

Fellow of the Collegiate Church.

MANCHESTER: Printed by JOSEPH HARROP,

For DANIEL NEWTON, Bookseller, in the Church-Yard.

THE PREFACE

IT having been ſuggeſted by ſome Well wiſhers to the INFIRMARY, *that the Publication of this Sermon might be of Service in recommending that very uſeful Charity—— the Deſign with which it was preach'd; The Preacher thought he could not conſiſtent with that, and the Principles of Chriſtian Love which he has endeavoured to inculcate, refuſe his Conſent thereto; and therefore hopes, that*

that what is done with a good Intention, and in Compliance with their *Opinion, will not be imputed to any Affectation, or Fondneſs to appear in Print; and that the ſame Reaſons will excuſe to the Publick, thoſe Inaccuracies and Imperfections, which are likely to be numerous, in a Diſcourſe not purpoſely written for their Peruſal.*

xiii JOHN, 34 Verſe.

A New Commandment I give unto you, that ye Love one another.

THE Authority of our Law-giver and Saviour JESUS CHRIST, enforced by the Conformity of his own Example, might be ſufficient to ſuperſede all Enquiry after Reaſons, why our *Love to one another* is here ſtiled a *New Commandment:* But leſt it ſhould be apprehended, that the Scriptures are any where at Variance, or that our Saviour and his *beloved* Diſciple, who has aſſerted, that *Love is no New Command, but what we had from the Beginning*, taught contrary Doctrines: And leſt our Silence upon this Occaſion ſhould ſeem to overlook, or depreciate the Dictates of Nature, which have always been conſtant and uniform in favour of Brotherly Affection; We muſt ſeek to reconcile this contrariety of Expreſſion, and give to Revelation and Nature each their due; which will eaſily be effected by applying the Negative of St. *John* to the Duty itſelf, and the poſitive Appellation of *New*, given by his Maſter, to the Extent, in which it is propoſed to the Obedience of his Followers; *by this*, ſaith he, *this* extenſive Degree of Love, *ſhall all Men know that ye are my Diſciples.*

To love one another is a moral Duty, and, therefore, of eternal Obligation; but in that Perfection required by the Goſpel, it is ſomething above the Level of unaſſiſted Nature, more ſublime and generous, than that which the Light of Reaſon had before diſcovered and preſcribed, yet what, ſince the Diſcovery, ſhe both approves and recommends. And, altho' *Moſes* did not omit to inculate the Love of our Neighbour, there is a very wide Difference between the Chriſtian and legal Precept, ariſing from the Solution of that Queſtion, *Who is thy Neighbour?* A Relation now of much larger Extent, than it was underſtood by the *Jews*, amongſt whom *Love* flowed in a very narrow Stream, the ſame with their Blood, confined to the Houſe of *Iſrael:* But, with us, it knows no ſuch Bounds, calls every one, with whom we have to do, *our Neighbour*, and diffuſive as Light, communicates to the Neceſſities of all around.

O! that I could worthily celebrate, and effectually recommend this generous, noble, diſintereſted Principle of Chriſtianity, ſo much to be admired for its Similitude and Reſemblance of that Spirit, which actuates the divine Counſels, and is the Author of all good Works, both in Heaven, and on Earth; the ſame that *moved upon the Face of the Waters* at the Creation, and has ſince been ſufficiently manifeſt in the Preſervation and *Redemption* of the World; the ſame that tunes the Voice and Harps of Angels, to their great Creator's Praiſe above, and wings them to the Charge and Aſſiſtance of his Creatures here below; the ſame that diſpoſes and unites our Hearts to co-operate with the bright Seraphim, filling us with good Deſires and Deſigns to *promote the Glory of God in the Higheſt, upon Earth Peace and good Will amongst Men*; the ſame that gave Riſe, and will, I hope, give Succeſs and Perpetuity to the glorious Undertaking, for the Recovery

very of Health and Strength to our diſtreſſed Brethren, until *our corruptible* Bodies *ſhall put on incorruption, our mortal put on immortality*; until *Death itſelf ſhall be ſwallowed up in Victory*, and *Sin and Sorrow be no more.*

It appears then by this previous Enquiry, that the Novelty of the Commandment in my Text, conſiſts in the Latitude and Degree to which Love is carried by the Goſpel, ſuperior to any other Diſpenſation, which will give me very pertinent Occaſion, to ſhew more at large the ſeveral Properties.

I. The Nature and Excellence.

II. The Extenſiveneſs and Impartiality of Chriſtian Love.

III. To recommend the Sick and Needy as proper Objects of it.

And Laſtly, to entreat your Aſſiſtance in compleating thoſe Meaſures, which are now taking for their Relief.

1. I am to ſhew the Nature and Excellence of Chriſtian Love.

Love is an univerſal Paſſion, only varying its Objects, and raiſing or ſinking its Elevation, according to the prevailing Habits and Diſpoſition of each particular Perſon. Remote and oppoſite Cauſes are impowered equally to affect different Minds; and one Man ſhall appear to be in Extaſy and Rapture upon the ſame Occaſion, upon which another only ſhews a modeſt Complacency and ſilent Approbation: So Rivers run, with leſs or greater Noiſe, according to their Depth. It was the Deſign, therefore, of Chriſt our Law-giver, *who knew what was in Man*, to rectify and guide

guide his Affections in the choice of proper Objects, and make them productive of the general Good.

Some, indeed, are ſo imperfectly inſtructed in the Goſpel Senſe of this Command, and their Love ſo abſorbed in Earthly Things, as never to appear beyond the Limits of ſtrict Juſtice, which it is intended vaſtly to exceed. Under this ſenſe of it, Society may perhaps ſubſiſt, but can never flouriſh, may eſcape Confuſion, but not arrive at Happineſs: Becauſe no Proviſion is thereby made for the caſual Evils, to which we are each of us expoſed, ſo often unequal to our own Strength. It is a very low Degree of Virtue, that preſcribes no more than abſtinence from Injury and Wrong. To cloſe our Ears to the Voice, our Hand to the Demands of every thing but the Law, is only to conſult our own perſonal Intereſt and Safety, *Publicans and Sinners do the ſame.* When Enquiry is made into the Management of our Talents, the Application of them will undergo the ſame Scrutiny; where the honeſt, if uncharitable, Servant, will have no great ſhare in his Maſter's Joy. *Well done*, is the Sentence of Approbation, that will paſs only upon him that hath been Liberal as well as Careful; that both *executeth Righteouſneſs*, and overflows in Acts of Civility and Kindneſs; whoſe ſtudy and delight is to do Good; whoſe Love hangs not upon his Tongue, nor terminates in fair unavailing Speeches, & empty wiſhes for the Welfare and Proſperity of another, but appears *in Deed and in Truth*; who ſees no Evil under the Sun, which he wiſhes not to remove; To give Eyes to the Blind and Feet to the Lame, Cloaths to the Naked, and Bread to the Hungry, Inſtruction to the Ignorant, and Reproof to the Wicked; in ſhort, He it is, *ſhall inherit the Bleſſing*, who endeavours to make his fellow Creatures BLESSED.

To

To proceed in the Excellencies of Chriſtian Love: It is *courteous* as well as *kind*, equal in Tenderneſs and Affability; not ſo deſirous of Fame and Thanks, as it is to deſerve both, and therefore does not ſtudy to enhance the Obligation, or encreaſe the Miſeries of the Unfortunate, by waiting for Sollicitation and Entreaty, but delights even to prevent their wiſhes; is a ſwift Meſſenger of Joy, and confers the greateſt Favours in ſuch an eaſy graceful Manner, as would make the ſmalleſt very acceptable; without raiſing any unwelcome Senſation, even a Bluſh, in the Receiver: For to brave ingenuous Spirits in Diſtreſs, it is leſs irkſome and diſagreeable to ſubmit in Silence, and conceal their Wants, than to accept Relief from a ſcornful Hand, or a ſupercilious Eye. There is ſomething ſo Divine and Charming in this Love, that, like Goodneſs itſelf, it ſtamps a value upon every thing we do; and without it the beſt we can do, will have neither Beauty, nor Worth. Give *we all our Goods to feed the Poor*, if with a view to gain the Admiration and Applauſe of Men, if to gratify a natural Tenderneſs, which prevails only whilſt the ſtronger Paſſions lie dormant and becalm'd; the Weakneſs and Imperfection of the Motive, will deſtroy the merit of the Action, in which Pride or Conſtitution, not *Love*, had the Aſcendant. Let *that* be deeply rooted in our Hearts; tho' Inclemency of Weather, or Barenneſs of the Soil may prevent its bringing forth much Fruit; and the Incapacity to execute, may render our good Wiſhes abortive, they will not, however, fail of acceptance with him, who is *a diſcerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart*, and expecteth us *only to give, as it is given unto us*. I ſay, tho' a narrow Fortune, and a large neceſſary domeſtick Expence, may not permit our Charity to be exemplary and glaring, yet our Love will give a Tincture of Brightneſs to the ſmalleſt Efforts of it.

I come, 2dly, To ſpeak of its great Extent, and Impartiality.

Of the whole Race of Mankind, there is none ſo remote in Place, ſo diſagreeable in Character or Manners, *as not to be entitled to*, tho' it is probable, few only may feel the good Effects of, or reap any Advantage from our *Love*. There are ſome, that want not our Aſſiſtance, and others, we may want Ability to aſſiſt; but as often as *we have Opportunity, we muſt be ready to do good to all.* No diſagreement in Opinion, no Affront or Injury received, *ought to ſeparate them from our Love.* Neither Duty nor Prudence require, indeed, that we ſhould be blind to the Miſbehaviour and Indiſcretions of thoſe, who have any Dependence upon our Favour, or make undue Compliances with their Requeſts; Yet we muſt continue our Good-will, after they have loſt our Eſteem, and endeavour to promote their Happineſs, tho' we diſapprove their Conduct. Our Rebuke may be *ſometimes* neceſſary, our Advice *often*; but our Hatred, *never. Evil*, ſaith an Apoſtle, is not *to be overcome with Evil, but Good.* Difference of Opinion, either in Politicks or Religion, may be the Occaſion of Jealouſy and Diſtruſt among the ſeveral Members of Society, but is no better Ground for perſonal Averſions, than that variety of Features which diſtinguiſh us from each other; for whereas *theſe*, are the immediate Appointment of Nature in the Womb, *that* is a natural Conſequence of the difference in Capacity and Education, which always ſubſiſted amongſt Men. Had Christ intended us the Liberty to expreſs our diſlike of particular Perſons, by a cool Look upon their Diſtreſs, a deaf Ear to their Entreaties, and a ſullen Refuſal of thoſe good Offices, which it is *in the Power of our Hand to do them*; had it not been his will and pleaſure to create Favour and Affection to thoſe in Need, who have no perſonal Recommendations of their own, He would not have preſſed this Duty upon his Followers

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in Terms, that will admit no Exceptions from the general Rule. Had he expected the *few* only, who are *of one Mind and one Judgment*, to dwell together in the mutual exercise of Benevolence and loving Kindness, so many strong Injunctions of Scripture had not been wanted to enforce Friendship so partial and selfish; these are tied together, as it were, by a natural and indissoluable Chain, we cannot but *love those, who love us*. Even the brute and savage Inhabitants of the Desart do reprove every Breach of that Union, by a general and undistinguishing Fondness for their own Species and Likeness: But the divine Wisdom foresaw Occasions, which would put the Sincerity of human Affections to many a severe Trial, and has, therefore, thought fit to apply the Authority of a divine Command, to strengthen and encrease them; lest Prejudice should at any time overpower the weaker Efforts of Nature, and make us overlook the Necessities of an Object, by giving too much Attention to its Faults; lest we should *with-hold Good from those that ask it*, till we have strictly examined the Title of their Demands, and what Recompence will attend our Compliance.

Again, All social Duties respect the general Good, the Rule and Standard by which Christianity measures *Love*, the most social Duty; and therefore God requires an impartial Distribution of Kindness and Civility, like his of the Showers and Light of Heaven, to *the just and unjust*. O! that we were as willing to imitate, as we are to receive, the universal Pledges of Divine Love. See the Father of Mankind, who *hateth nothing that he has made*, with an unlimited and undistinguishing Hand, pouring his Benefits upon us out of the fruitful Lap of Nature! See the Son cloathed in our Flesh, that he might thereby recommend and familiarize his Precepts to us, *Going about doing good* without Exception to any Man's Person; always healing those, that apply'd to him for Relief, often applying himself to the Relief of those, who neither desired, nor deserved

ſerved it, and laſtly *dying for his very Enemies!* And we ſhall learn by Example, as well as Precept, the Boundaries of Chriſtian Love to be *the Ends of the Earth, with all the Inhabiters thereof.* And, when we perceive the leaſt Inclination in ourſelves to abandon the Diſtreſſed, upon a conceit of their miſbehaviour, diſagreement, or diſlike to us, let the diſintereſted and impartial Love of the good *Samaritan* rebuke that of the Chriſtian, as it did of the *Levite*, who *paſſed by on the other Side*; whilſt he, with an unlimited Expence, ſet himſelf to redreſs the Grievances of a wounded *Jew*, *who had fallen among ſt Thieves*, tho' he was by Profeſſion as much his Enemy, as any Thief amongſt them. *Do thou*, therefore, as the Moral of that Parable directs, *go and do likewiſe.*

HAVING now ſhewn at large, wherein conſiſts the Novelty of our Saviour's Command, by endeavouring to deſcribe the Beauty and Extent of Chriſtian Love, (if what is beautiful beyond Expreſſion, and extenſive without Bounds, can properly be ſaid to be deſcribed;) I come,

3dly, To recommend the Sick and Needy, as proper Objects of it.

WE are obliged, indeed, to love all Mankind, but not with an equal degree of Warmth and Affection; we are obliged to relieve all Objects within the compaſs of our Abilities; but a preference will ſtill be due, as greater Neceſſity, or other extraordinary Circumſtances ſhall direct. Attend then to the preſſing Occaſions of thoſe, for whom I plead.

IT ought to be ſufficient merely to inform you, that they are *Sick and Needy*; but, conſidering the general Inattention of Mankind to what they do not feel, it may, perhaps, quicken your Senſibility

and

and enlarge your Conceptions of their Woe, if I expatiate a little upon their wretched State. They are Perſons labouring under a variety of Diſeaſes, and the acuteſt Pains, without any proſpect, or even poſſibility of Relief from their own endeavours; *Deſtitute, afflicted, tormented,* Images of Diſtreſs, ever grievous to the Eyes and Ears of Humanity; no Heart ſo obdurate, as not to feel their Sorrow, no kind one, but what ſhares it. Sufficient are the Evils, even of Poverty alone, to depreſs the fainting Objects, that are compelled to bear them; but when her quiver is replete with the additional Arrows of ſome dire Diſeaſe, and the Body is emaciated with Pain, as well as Hunger, the ſtrongeſt Efforts of Nature can no longer ſupport the complicated Load.

NEITHER is the Affliction leſs grievous, happening to a Perſon of competent ability, whilſt in Health, to provide againſt his own domeſtick Wants; on the contrary, it muſt greatly aggravate it, to be at once deprived of the Comforts of Health, and the Means of Subſiſtence, that is, the Strength and Activity of his Limbs, by which he earned his daily Bread; Himſelf, perhaps, not the only Sufferer! A numerous Offspring, with their helpleſs Mother may chance to be involved in his Diſtreſs, and by their attachment to his Perſon in the undivided Moiety of a Cottage, a Garret, or a Cellar, confined to hear inceſſant Groans and Complaints, which they can neither ſooth nor redreſs; to wallow in unavoidable Uncleanneſs, and, with their thin Diet, to ſuck in the noiſome effluvias of putrifying Sores, or an infectious Diſeaſe.

THESE are not the Dreams of Fancy, but the Reports of Truth; I have ſeen, I have pitied, and I have often wiſhed, that ſome more effectual Method might be found than what the Law propoſes, and in a great Meaſure ſubmits to the Diſcretion of parochial Officers for their Relief; who cannot, if I may mention it without

Offence,

Offence, always diſtinguiſh the Neceſſitous from the Extravagant, the modeſt Sufferer from the ſlothful Impoſtor. No wonder, therefore, that repeated abuſes of their favourable Attention to the importunity of *ſeeming* Diſtreſs, ſhould ſometimes diſpoſe them to be ſuſpicious, and leſs mindful of that which is *real*: But ſuppoſing, that amongſt the numerous deſtitute of this, or any other extenſive Pariſh, no unhappy diſtempered Object ſhould eſcape their Notice, or in vain ſollicit for medicinal Aſſiſtance, It muſt be attended with an Expence beyond all Bounds, and not likely to meet with the expected Succeſs; for there is, generally, in poor Families, ſuch an Inſufficiency of Care and Attendance upon the Sick, ſuch a Scarcity of Food, convenient and proper for them, ſuch an Averſion to Confinement and Regularity, as muſt eventually defeat the moſt judicious, and I may ſay, the moſt coſtly Applications.

But Thanks to the good Providence of God, which has, at length, raiſed a Spirit of Benevolence and Love amongſt us, to provide a Remedy for all theſe Inconveniences, in the Foundation, and happy Progreſs of our INFIRMARY; to the Honour, Ornament, and great Utility of the Publick, in this and ſucceeding Ages: For I truſt, that what you have thus generouſly begun, will be as chearfully finiſhed, and effectually ſupported. True Charity does in nothing more reſemble the Image of God, than, like him, in *delighting to perfect all its Works*. Mean and narrow Minds are apt to deſpond, and *grow weary with Well-doing*; and, tho' it may pleaſe their Vanity, to be diſtinguiſhed in the Front of a good Deſign, they ſoon faint and turn back in the Purſuit, if Difficulty or Expence threaten their Perſeverance. Not ſuch the glowing Ardor, Spirit, and Reſolution of thoſe, who have hitherto promoted this ſalutary Work; The Deſire of doing Good made them inquiſitive after the Means, their Enquiries have been

been gratified with Succeſs, and Succeſs quickens their Deſire of doing more; after the Example of the *Samaritan* before-mentioned, they were grieved for the Afflictions of the Stranger, as well as others; and having *poured Wine and Oil into their Wounds*, and brought them to the firſt convenient Inn, that could be met with for the preſent, are now preparing a more ſpacious and commodious Manſion for perfecting their Recovery, at an Expence vaſtly ſuperior to the Proviſion already made, or than could be expected poſſible to be made, in the Infancy of this moſt auſpicious Deſign.

THE Nature and Uſe of INFIRMARIES are now ſo generally underſtood, that they want no praiſe of mine to recommend them to your Approbation. To recite the Numbers that have been cured, or relieved, Numbers beyond Expectation, ſince the ſhort Commencement of our own; would only be to eccho back the publick Voice, the Reports of Experience and Authority. To mention the Integrity and Skill, with which it is conducted by thoſe, who are principally concerned in the Application of your Contributions to their ſeveral Uſes, Domeſtick and Medicinal; would ſeem officious and fulſome, when they have never been diſputed. Envy herſelf, ever induſtrious to foment Jealouſies and diſturb the Unity of publick Counſels, has hitherto thrown no Darts at the Managers of this Charity; It muſt, therefore, be premature and unneceſſary to riſe in their Defence.

FULLY perſwaded then, that no real Objection has, or can ariſe to diſcredit their Proceedings; That no better, no other ſo effectual a Method can be contrived, to reſtore Eaſe and Health to thoſe, who are in no Capacity to obtain either, without your Aſſiſtance, who through Penury and Diſeaſe are become burdenſome, inſtead of a Support, to their ſympathizing Families.

I muſt

I must entreat you, in the last Place, to join Heart and Hand in promoting so unexceptionable and beneficent a Design, However great and expensive, made light and easy by a general Concurrence. A little and a little from those, who can well spare, will soon compleat the whole; So friendly Streams, without Prejudice to the Fountains, from whence they flow, unite and form the Grand Reservoir.

It is Time now to acquaint you, that in Aid of the Annual Subscriptions, however large, still insufficient for the common, as well as extraordinary Expences of the Current Year, that you are desired, according to your several Abilities, to favour the Contributions intended to be made at the Doors of this Assembly. Depart not therefore, I beseech you, without proving your Christian Affection to the Brethren in Distress. Let not your Hand be altogether empty before the Lord, when the Cries of those in Pain, the Tears of the Afflicted, petition for Relief; when the *Bones that have been broken*, perhaps in your Service, depend wholly upon your Bounty, for future *Joy and Gladness*. If the want of Love be at any Time a Fault, when Numbers are ready to perish for the Want of it, it must be extremely displeasing to God, who will not fail to resent such Instances of Cruelty to his Creatures, as marks of Disaffection to himself, according to the conclusive Reasoning of St. *John*, *If a Man say I love God, and hateth his Brother, He is a liar, for he that loveth not his Brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom, he hath not seen?* Let your Love then prove your Faith, and the *Love of God make you perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto every good Work*. To whom, for his Mercy and Loving-kindness to us, be ascribed all Honour, Glory, and Thanks, now and for ever. AMEN.

F I N I S.

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